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E45

ACTION INR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AMAD-00	A-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00
	WHA-00	DS-00	EUR-00	UTED-00	VC-00	H-00	TEDE-00
	IO-00	LAB-01	VCE-00	AC-00	NSAE-00	OIC-00	ACE-00
	TEST-00	BEG-00	R-00	ECA-00	IIP-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/001W			

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O 301400Z MAY 04
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6504
INFO NSC WASHDC
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY MEXICO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
USINT HAVANA
USCINCSO MIAMI FL

RELEASED IN FULL

UNCLAS CARACAS 001844

NSC FOR TOM SHANNON
STATE FOR INR/R/MR:IMARR AND STHIBEAULT, WHA/AND:HOEY,
WHA/PDA:CAVANAUGH, PACE/PR/FPCW/WHA:DPRINCE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: KPAO, PGOV, OPRC, KIRC, VE

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: REACTION TO SIGNATURE
VERIFICATION (REPAROS) PROCESS FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL
RECALL REFERENDUM PETITION

1. The following is a summary of editorials and op-eds,
appearing in both pro-government and opposition
Venezuelan press from 05-27-04 to 05-28-04, on the
signature verification (reparos) process for the
Presidential recall referendum petition.

2. "Let's Get on with It." English language "The Daily
Journal's" version of the editorial of afternoon liberal
daily "Tal Cual" (05/27):

Begin Quote: "With the installation of the stations for

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the signature verification on Thursday, the "reparo" process began, and Friday through Sunday will see the process carried out. The Democratic Coordinator (CD) has remained faithful to its democratic strategy, and if the Colombian paramilitary episode served any purpose, it was to vividly show that the "reparo" process is in no way connected to any antidemocratic project by the CD. The President himself had to retract his first, irresponsible accusations against the leaders of the CD. It is clear that the latter do not have a 'Plan B'. The government should stop acting in a paranoid manner. Chavez and his people should cease their frequent allusions that 'this time' they won't be 'caught by surprise' as they were in April 2002, for it shows an unjustifiable apprehension that becomes manipulation. End Quote.

3. "Chavez' Letter to the Washington Post." Veneconomy editorial in English language daily "The Daily Journal" (05/28).

Begin Quote: The government has mounted a full-blown campaign to deflect or discredit any criticism that the Friends of Venezuela group of countries might level at the fraudulent maneuverings that the administration has perpetrated to avoid the recall referendum against Chavez. The most recent tactic is a letter to "The Washington Post," in which Chavez reiterates, along a series of old lies, that the process for collecting signatures for calling a recall referendum is transparent and objective. In his letter, Chavez laments that the opposition has not given a commitment to accept the outcome, as he himself has done. End Quote.

4. "Mr. Noriega Missed His Chance to Keep Silent." Op-ed in afternoon liberal daily "Tal Cual" (05/27).

Begin Quote: Mr. Roger Noriega, whose visible intellectual limitations perfectly qualify him for the role of an elephant in a glassware shop, issued some statements yesterday, which are not only ill timed, but clumsy. A unilateral way of acting has become a second nature to the Bush administration. Even though the U.S. is member of the OAS and of the Group of Friends, the Bush administration sets these organizations aside and goes it alone in a clear interference that only serves to feed Chavez's delirious fantasy of having marines disembarking at La Guaira port. The infinite arrogance of the American mega-power blinds them to the subtleties and discretion they should have when dealing with countries like ours, which, in many occasions, has

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suffered from direct invasions to the promotion of coups by different incumbents in the White House, and whose nationalism has surfaced. Samper remained in power because he had a U.S. ambassador providing statements against him every day. Evo Morales was about to win the elections after the U.S. Ambassador criticized him harshly. If it is true that nationalism is the last refuge of rogue governments, why give them a chance to use it as a shield? End Quote.

5. "A Chavista in New York." Op-ed by journalist Elizabeth Fuentes in afternoon liberal daily "Tal Cual" (05/27).

Begin Quote: I feel the incident Mayor Bernal's envoy experienced when trying to enter the United States was sad, but we should not overlook the real heart of the matter. The real question we pose to the attorney investigating the case of Sumate: why do you call a U.S. grant received by Sumate high treason, but when another organization from the same country grants Bernal who knows what, then it is revolutionary solidarity? I can't understand. End Quote.

6. "Optimism or Triumph?" Op-ed by political analyst Manuel Felipe Sierra in leading liberal daily "El Nacional" (05/28).

Begin Quote: If the opposition - as it is foreseeable - overcomes the challenge of the "reparos," it will have achieved an overwhelming victory. The government would face an essential dilemma: either it recognizes the result, which means the immediate call for the recall referendum, or it simply does not honor the will of the people. The first situation would be contradictory to the purposes of the Bolivarian revolution, blocking a path that would put the survival of the process in danger, and the second one would deepen even more the political and social polarization of the country. End Quote.

7. "Reparos and the Group of Friends." Op-ed by Antonio Sanchez Garcia in leading liberal daily "El Nacional" (05/28).

Begin Quote: The Group of Friends of the Secretary General of the OAS recently issued a statement that highlights again the importance of a peaceful, constitutional, democratic and electoral solution to the

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crisis of governance affecting Venezuela. We welcome this statement of the Group of Friends and also call on the nations to watch closely the maneuverings of the ruling party to try to block and sabotage the process of the reparos. The following days are not only critical for us; they are also critical for Brazil, Mexico, Spain, the United States and Portugal. They have taken on a serious responsibility. End Quote.

8. "The Decline of Charisma." Editorial in leading liberal daily "El Nacional" (05/28).

Begin Quote: If anything deserves to be highlighted during these days of "reparos" beginning today is that they mark a historic fall in President Chavez's political charisma. Nothing is more frightening and terrible for a ruler than that immense isolation that engulfs him when his popularity plummets and he realizes that he cannot escape from failure. That is when he is attacked by the idea of a nationwide conspiracy to kill him and of a vast international conspiracy to overthrow him. We Venezuelans are victims of that increasing deterioration of the President's personality. The democratic balance of the branches of power was turned, through a series of moves of the Executive branch, into a simple formality. To stop this deterioration of democracy and to seek a decent alternative, Venezuelans have had to overcome many obstacles. Today we go to the "reparos," a defining effort, to rescue the country from that nightmare that wants to take us back to the past. End Quote.

9. "Again." Editorial in leading conservative daily "El Universal" (05/28).

Begin Quote: Many times, especially at the most critical moments, Hugo Chavez argued that the recall referendum, an instrument which he claims to have been the main advocate, was the peaceful, democratic, electoral and fair solution to the long running crisis tormenting the country. However, the reality is completely different.

The work to block and obstruct the possibility of letting the voice of the people be heard is so obvious that many nations and important figures has expressed their concern about the clear anti-democratic and repressive signs the Government has showed to impede the vote. Civil society, drawing on its untamable democratic spirit, goes to another civic test, with faith in its leaders and, despite everything, in the institutions and in the arbiter. End Quote.

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10. "To Sign." Op-ed by international expert Maruja Tarre in leading conservative daily "El Universal" (05/28).

Begin Quote: Our signatures pose a challenge for a deeply inept and totally corrupt government, which intends to remain in power by establishing an outdated and authoritarian system of government, inconsistent with the interests of the nations and with the values we have learned as Venezuelans over various decades of freedom. Our signatures are our last chance to voice our deep rejection of everything that has happened and might happen in our country. No other generation of Venezuelans had had such a big responsibility: to sign!
End Quote.

11. "Reparos, Rain or Shine." Editorial in afternoon liberal daily "El Mundo" (05/27).

Begin Quote: Beginning May 28, we will know whether we will hold a recall referendum or not. That decision is crucial. It would serve to create a peaceful stage from which to define who is the majority in Venezuela. The government included the figure of a recall referendum in the new Constitution, but it has done nothing but avoid it. Spokesmen from both sides foresee extreme situations in the coming days. People are nervous throughout the country. We must bet on the consciousness of the Venezuelan people. We must trust that, even though public employees are pressured to withdraw their signatures from the recall petitions, both revolutionaries and democrats agree that the recall referendum guarantees peace. The rest is uncertainty, radicalization of hatred, a door to violence. If Chavez wins the recall, it will be accepted, and he will stay in Miraflores until 2006, when new elections will be held. If he loses, we may have a different stage to change the course of the country towards a future of more plurality.
End Quote.

12. "I Will Indeed Go to the Reparos." Op-ed by Adrian Guacaran in pro-government web site Aporrea (05/28).

Begin Quote: As a man I have made many mistakes, like anybody else, but thank God, I have had the chance to repair them, and thus, I would like those who signed against our President Hugo Chavez to realize the big mistake they made since it could cost us a lot. I was

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forced to make that mistake in order to keep my job since I work in public company controlled by the opposition, but I regret having done so when I see a group of criminals fighting for laying their hands on all the wealth the country is receiving as a result of the oil exports and the good economic management we have so far. It even hurts me to see a U.S. official saying that if the CNE did not call for the recall vote, the U.S. would intervene. Why should we sell our country? We can't disagree with the plans and missions the President of the Poor and his team have carried out. Missions that are not exactly what many expect, but they do solve a good number or all of the problems of our beloved Venezuela. End Quote.

13. "What Should We Do? Should We Kill Each Other?"
Op-ed by journalist Mary Pili Hernandez in leading liberal daily "El Nacional" (05/27).

Begin Quote: This week is crucial for the presidential recall vote. In a few days, we will finally know if the famous recall referendum will be held or not. The announcement of the National Electoral Council regarding this will be definite. Regardless of the result, what is clear is that, with the levels of polarization in the country, there will be a group that will protest the decision. If the CNE says that with "reparos" the opposition gathered enough signatures to call for the recall, the members of the Ayacucho Command will say, for sure, that this is the result of the mega fraud the opposition had mounted. If, on the contrary, the CNE says the required number of signatures was not reached, the members of the opposition coordinator will call on their followers to take it to the streets and protest what they will label as a trap. End Quote.

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